La Crosse FRO Accomplishment Highlights Report

Aquatic Nuisance Species:

Results of zebra mussel monitoring on St. Croix River

08/22/2003

During the week of August 18-22, 2003, the FWS in coordination with the NPS conducted a series of scuba dives to document the current status of the exotic zebra mussel in the lower 28.5 river miles of the St. Croix River bordering Wisconsin and Minnesota. The latest survey indicates no zebra mussels in the St. Croix River downstream from the High Bridge upstream of the City of Stillwater to the City of Bayport, where we started seeing very low densities of zebra mussels. Higher densities of zebra mussels are evident from the Kinnickinnic Narrows downstream to the mouth of the St. Croix River.

Specifically we documented the following: St. Croix River Mile (RM) 28.5 downstream to RM 21, no zebra mussels were found RM 20, along MN shoreline, 3 adult zm's found RM 18.5, along MN shoreline, 4 adult zm's found RM 17.4 to 16.1, Hudson Narrows, 13 adult zm's found RM 16, WI shoreline along I-94 causeway riprap, adult zm density = 12-16/m2 RM 16 to 12.5, along MN shoreline, 7 adult zm's found RM 11.5, along MN shoreline at City of Afton, adult zm density = 16/m2 RM 6.5, along MN shoreline in Kinnickinnic Narrows, adult zm density = 408/m2 RM 4, along MN shoreline near St. Croix Bluffs Regional Park, adult zm density = 8-28/m2 RM 0.2, along WI shoreline near Prescott Higgins' eye relocation site, adult zm density = 400/m2
The NPS will be summarizing all the results in a report, which will be available and will include data from our last series of dives beginning the week of Sept. 29th.

Richard Rowse

Tribal Assistance:

La Crosse FRO Staff Review Tribal Grants

09/25/2003

This was a regional review of resource projects submitted by the tribes to the FWS for funding. The highest ranked projects will compete nationally for funding and should be very competitive with the other regions. Good luck!

Staff from La Crosse FRO assisted on the evaluation of the tribal grants that were submitted for funding. Project ranking was challenging but very interesting. Projects were interesting and well written with a wide variety of resource concerns ranging from wild rice to lake sturgeon. It was evident that the majority of the proposals were organized and thorough and should compete favorably on the national level.

Scott Yess

Federal and State Lands Assistance/Interjurisdictional Fisheries:

Island Construction Benefits Fishery on Upper Miss.

09/26/2003

Information obtained from the habitat projects will be used in the future to improve project design and efficiency.

La Crosse FRO initiated a new project this year as requested by the Upper Mississippi Wildlife and Fish Refuge - Winona District. The study is designed to determine fish usage in Polander Lake's new island complex. These islands were constructed as part of the Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project (HREP) on the Upper Miss. Several HREP's have islands as a feature built into the project. The islands help break up wind fetch which should reduce suspended sediments, they also create slack water habitat which promotes vegetation growth and provides food and cover for both fish and wildlife. Nesting habitat for waterfowl and turtles are also benefits of island construction.

Fishery monitoring was conducted on September 25th and 26th. This information will be compared to the spring and summer data which will help determine seasonal use. Both electrofishing and trap netting were conducted, and fish collected were weighed, measured and released. This project is a great follow up to the paddlefish work which was conducted in Polander last year. The information obtained from this project will help resource managers make critical decisions on habitat projects.

Scott Yess

Habitat Restoration and Conservation:

Divers Search for Endangered Winged Mapleleaf

10/01/2003

Four new Winged Mapleleaf were collected for use in the host fish research. These mussels are critical to the success of the research.

Divers from the Fish and Wildlife Service assisted Dr. Mark Hove, University of Minnesota, in an effort to locate winged mapleleaf mussels. Winged Mapleleaf are an endangered species considered to be one of the rarest mussels in North America and are only found in a short stretch of the St. Croix River near Taylor's Falls. Dr. Hove, along with researchers from USGS and La Crosse FRO, are trying to determine the host fish species for the winged mapleleaf. A critical step to this research is finding gravid winged mapleleaf. To date this has been a major obstacle, but in 2003 several gravid mussels were stocked piled and transferred to Dr. Hove's lab. These mussels should produce sufficient numbers of glochidia to conduct the host research.

Scott Yess

Habitat Restoration and Conservation:

No Paddlefish Found Near Pool 8 Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project

10/01/2003

No paddlefish were netted during the Pool 8 HREP 5 month study near Stoddard, Wisconsin. 5 USFWS employees and 12 volunteers caught bigmouth buffalo, sauger, northern pike, longnose gar, freshwater drum, common carp, walleye and lake sturgeon. It is doubtful the study will continue next year.

Starting the week of May 5th, 2003, the La Crosse Fishery Resource Office (FRO) launched another new project to determine paddlefish usage of Navigation Pool 8 Island Habitat Rehabilitation and Enhancement Project (HREP) area across from the Stoddard boat landing. From studies carried out by U.S. Geological Survey employees Steve Zigler and Brent Knights, it has been determined that paddlefish prefer sites with a depth of > 2 m and tranquil flows ranging from 0.1-0.3 m/s. Success of paddlefish utilizing sites with these characteristics has also been found near the Pool 5A, Polander Lake, HREP Islands by U.S. Fish and Wildlife employees. During both HREP projects, deep holes were dredged to supply borrow material for the construction of the islands. Paddlefish were successfully caught in and around the deep holes created in Pool 5A. Since both HREP projects were so similar, it was determined that paddlefish may be utilizing the area near the newly created Pool 8 HREP islands. Mark Steingraeber from La Crosse FRO led the 5 month, Pool 8 study. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees from the Upper Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Refuge and La Crosse FRO and 12 volunteers sampled 10 days using 300' long, 24' deep, 5" bar gill nets.

The greatest depth in the dredged holes was 39' and current flows ranged from 0.01 – 0.50 m/s. Species of fish caught were: bigmouth buffalo, sauger, northern pike, longnose gar, freshwater drum, common carp, walleye and lake sturgeon. A spiny softshell turtle was even caught in the net one day. One of the most noted items netted and recovered during the survey was a historic (pre lock and dam system) refuge sign from the 1920's or 30's. It will be sent to NCTC for preservation. Since no paddlefish were caught during the study, it is doubtful that the study will carry on next year.

Heidi Keuler

Outreach:

1,500 High School Students Learn About Careers at the La Crosse Center's Career Expo

10/02/2003

At least 150 high school juniors and sophomores learned about different careers in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (with a strong emphasis on the Fisheries Program.) Many students also learned about the STEP, SCEP and Volunteer Programs. This was a great opportunity for the students to not only learn about the careers in the USFWS, but also about how natural resources are managed.

Approximately 1,500 high school sophomores and juniors from 22 school districts in the La Crosse area attended the La Crosse Center's Career Expo on October 2, 2003. The Career Expo was a joint effort of the Greater La Crosse Area Chamber of Commerce, Western Wisconsin Technical College, the Wisconsin Education Fair and 22 area high schools. There were 50 different booths which focused on six career clusters including: Agri-Business Science Technology & Natural Resources; Arts, Humanities & Communication; Business Management, Administration & Marketing; Health Care; Human Services & Education; and Industrial Science & Manufacturing Technologies. About 150 students visited the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Career Booth where they could learn about being a wildlife biologist, special agent, refuge manager, a fishery biologist,

and many other careers in the USFWS. Heidi Keuler from the La Crosse FRO spoke to an ethically diverse array of students on the career of a fishery biologist. Students were able to ask questions during an informal discussion and gain insight from photos taken of fishery biologists in the field. Many students were very interested in the STEP, SCEP, and volunteer programs. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife booth at the Career Expo was a great opportunity for the students to not only learn about the careers in the USFWS, but also how we help manage natural resources.

Heidi Keuler

Habitat Restoration and Conservation/Tribal Assistance:

Lake Sturgeon Reintroduction on Menominee Indian Reservation

10/22/2003

The status of a local lake sturgeon population improved from extirpated to what might be considered endangered. There is improved access to high quality spawning habitat by a limited number of adult lake sturgeon.

Fishery biologists from La Crosse FRO and Genoa NFH, along with the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, Wisconsin DNR, and the U.S. Geological Survey, conducted efforts to restore a lake sturgeon population on the Menominee Indian Reservation in northeast Wisconsin on October 21 and 22 of 2003. Lake sturgeon had been extirpated from this part of their range after construction of two dams in the early 1900s. Since 1995, the La Crosse Fishery Resources Office has taken the lead to restore this population of lake sturgeon and this year, as in years past, adult lake sturgeon were captured downstream from the dams, tagged with radio transmitters, and reintroduced to reservation waters of the Wolf River upstream from the dams. The fish were anesthetized to enable biologists to surgically implant transmitters that have a battery life of 4 years. The transmitters allow tribal biologist to track fish movements, habitat use, and determine whether or not individuals migrate back downstream through the dams. Although over half the 151 fish reintroduced since the first reintroduction effort in 1995 have migrated downstream, biologists are hopeful that enough fish may be present to support some natural reproduction as abundant high quality spawning habitat exists in the reintroduction area. Adequate natural reproduction will hopefully someday lead to the overall goal of the project, a self-sustaining lake sturgeon population.

Ann Runstrom

Tribal Assistance:

Fall "Ceded Territory" Walleye Electrofishing Surveys

10/23/2003

Walleye from 27 northern Wisconsin ceded territory lakes as well as Mille Lacs and Green Lakes in Minnesota were measured, aged and recorded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and GLIFWC.

An electrofishing crew from the La Crosse Fishery Resource Office “FRO” successfully aided the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission “GLIFWC” in completing an eight week fall “Young-of-the-year”

walleye survey from September 2 – October 23, 2003. The FRO crew consisting of Dave Wedan, Heidi Keuler, and Steve Skemp helped GLIFWC and Ashland FRO crews survey 27 northern Wisconsin ceded territory lakes, along with Mille Lacs and Green Lakes in Minnesota.

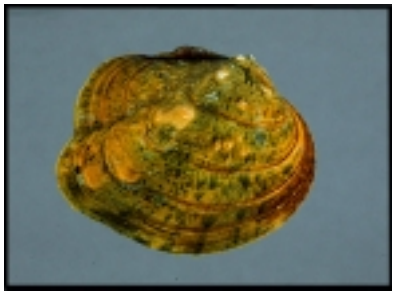
Dave Wedan

Outreach:

Seek Hidden Treasure On Line! New Internet Web Site on Mussels of the Upper Mississippi River

10/28/2003

U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees created a brand new web site for use by government agencies as well as the general public. There is an excellent multimedia section for teachers and students to use as part of their curriculum.



A new web site on Freshwater Mussels of the Upper Mississippi River System http://midwest.fws.gov/mussel is now available on the Internet. The site was created by biologists and webmasters from the U.S. Geological Survey and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and contains a wealth of information on identification, threatened and endangered mussels, life history, ecology, history of harvest, current threats, conservation activities, ongoing studies and projects. Also included is a multimedia section with numerous photos, videos and graphics on freshwater mussels and an education section for teachers. The site also highlights activities to save the federally endangered Higgins eye pearlymussel (Lampsilis higginsii) from extinction including propagation at Genoa National Fish Hatchery, cage culture, relocation of adults and juvenile mussels, survey and monitoring results, and information on exotic zebra mussels (Dreissena polymorpha).

Gary Wege

Federal and State Lands Assistance:

La Crosse Fishery Resource Office and Rydell National Wildlife Refuge 2003 Walleye Harvest

10/31/2003

Seventy acre Clifford Lake on Rydell NWR yielded a record 83,750 7-10" juvenile walleyes were netted in October to La Crosse FRO, Genoa NFH, and Rydell NWR crews. These fish were then stocked into other federally and tribally managed waters in Region 3.

Seventy acre Clifford Lake on Rydell National Wildlife Refuge “NWR” yielded a record 83,750 7-10” juvenile walleyes in October to La Crosse Fishery Resource Office “FRO,” Genoa National Fish Hatchery “NFH”, and Rydell NWR crews. Genoa NFH stocks Clifford with walleye fry each spring. After thriving and growing naturally all summer, Dave Wedan from the La Crosse FRO sets “trap or “fyke” nets around the shoreline daily, pulling the net and transferring the lively walleyes to Genoa NFH’s distribution trucks. Genoa crews then distribute and “stock” the walleyes into federally and tribally managed waters. Genoa’s crew consisted of Roger Gordon and Jeff Lockington, along with Rydell NWR’s Bob Hiltner, JuanCarlos Giese, and Dave Bennett. This year, because of the high numbers of walleyes netted, White Earth Tribal Biologists Randy Zortman and Technician Will Bement also provided assistance with the netting, distribution, and stocking efforts.

Dave Wedan